

11 January 2021

Open letter to parents/carers of children & young people with SEND

Dear Parent/Carer,

The National Lockdown announced by the Prime Minister on the 4 January will have not been the start to the New Year we all would have hoped for. We acknowledge how extremely stressful and challenging 2020 has been for you and your family and hope that despite this, you and your family are keeping safe and well. We have provided information about some of the excellent local and national resources you and your child can access at the end of this letter.

We want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the immediate challenge that the recent news provides for our Early Years settings, schools and colleges to ensure that your children can access their learning should you wish your child to return to their education setting this term.

You will be aware that the government has announced that children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) can return to school and that a place will be available for them. Please be assured of the commitment of all our education leaders to welcome some or all their children back this term, however some settings are experiencing staffing capacity challenges which require them, as a last resort, to prioritise the return of children based on individual needs and safety. We ask that you continue to show the same patience and compassion to leaders and staff in our settings that you have demonstrated throughout this national emergency whilst arrangements are put in place.

Whether or not your child's education setting is putting in place the rapid testing programme right away, it is very important that we reassure you that all settings will be continuing to regularly review and put in place all the protective measures recommended by Public Health England and the Department for Education to reduce the risk of transmission. These include social distancing, hand washing, good ventilation, face coverings as appropriate and ensuring people with symptoms do not attend. These remain the most effective ways to reduce the spread of the virus, even with rapid testing in place.

With transmission of the virus continuing to remain high across the country we wish to remind you that if your child or a member of your household is unwell or has symptoms of COVID 19 you must follow the [national stay at home guidance](#) to reduce further transmission of the virus.

Finally, may we take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support to staff and leaders in our education settings; through your commitment to work in partnership we can together ensure that all our children can access their learning and the support they need to secure their wellbeing and a successful future.

Yours sincerely



Ruth Hutchinson
Surrey County Council
Director of Public Health



Rachael Wardell
Surrey County Council
Executive Director of Children, Families
and Lifelong Learning.

Local and national support that is available to families:

[Our Local Offer website](#) provides detailed information about the services and help available to children and young people in Surrey with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The advisors in the Local Offer team may be able to assist you with finding support for you or your child during the lockdown period and can be contacted by email localoffer@surreycc.gov.uk

[Qwell](#) is a new service which offers online mental health and wellbeing support specifically to Surrey parent/carers of children with SEND. It is available for free and offers one-to-one online text chat counselling sessions, with trained counsellors along with access to self-help tools. You can register for Qwell through their website.

[Family Voice Surrey](#) is the parent/carer forum for families of children and young people with SEND living in Surrey. They are an independent parent/carer-led organisation who work to champion the voices of SEND families, by highlighting sources of advice and training, and opportunities to influence the development and improvement of local SEND services. Information about your local coordinator and Facebook groups can be found on their website.

During Lockdown our children and young people may spend more time online, whether it be to keep in touch with friends or play games. The online safety service [Internet Matters](#) have recently launched a safety hub aimed at parent/carers and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

[Kooth](#) is an online service providing online mental health counselling, wellbeing support and self-help information. It is available for children and young people aged between 10-18..

The User Voice and Participation (UVP) Team encourage children and young people to share their views and opinions about the services they use. They do this through a group just for children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) SEND Youth Advisors Surrey (SYAS). If you're aged 10-25, you can join SYAS. You can contact the UVP team by email to do so, their email is user.voice@surreycc.gov.uk

[CYP Haven](#) is a mental health service for children and young people aged 10-18, living in Surrey. It is currently offering a virtual service that young people can call on 07773 008435 weekdays 4pm-8.30pm and on weekends 12pm-6pm.

If you are concerned about your child's emotional well-being you can contact the **CAMHS Single Point of Access** on 0300 222 5755.